



# LARRY CROUSE



## REPRESENTATIVE LARRY CROUSE

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**Internet page:**

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**Legislative Hotline:**

1-800-562-6000

**Legislative Hotline for  
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1-800-635-9993



• Representative Larry Crouse •

Dear friends & neighbors,

The 2006 legislative session is now in the books and state law-makers most likely will not convene back in Olympia until January 2007. **The session saw some good accomplishments** – and a few disappointments. I'd like to share with you my views on these matters in this newsletter.

One of **my top priorities as your state representative** remains the same as it was when I first took office – **creating and preserving jobs**. We need to eliminate some of the barriers that still exist to make it easier for employers to grow, hire workers, and offer health insurance. This can be done by **reforming state government**, eliminating duplicative regulations, and streamlining others. This also means **not increasing taxes on employers and families**.

Another one of my priorities is **finding solutions to local challenges** – whether it's negotiating for more money at the state level for mental health services or working with state agencies to better manage local resources, **I try to always take local issues head on**.

If you have ideas or concerns you'd like to share with me about issues affecting you and your family, please feel free to contact me. I always appreciate receiving your questions and comments.

Sincerely,

Rep. Larry Crouse

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## REPORT FROM THE LEGISLATURE

*To constituents of the 4th Legislative District*

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# REP. LARRY CROUSE • DISTRICT 4

## KEEPING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS SAFE FROM SEX OFFENDERS



It's important to feel safe in the neighborhoods we live in, yet we all know problems lurk that prevent us from always being completely comfortable with our surroundings.

This year the Legislature took a step in the right direction when it comes to punishing sex offenders. Through the passage of **House Bill 3277**, we will now impose **25-year sentences** for **sexual offenses committed against children under 15, people with developmental disabilities, and vulnerable adults**. People in positions of authority – such as teachers, coaches, and clergy – who commit the same crimes are also subject to the same sentences.

I also supported successful legislation that **boosts penalties for child pornography**, requires **electronic monitoring of certain sex offenders**, and **prohibits people who have committed sex crimes from living within two blocks of schools**.

## PUNISHING DRUNK DRIVERS



There are still **too many drunk drivers** on our streets and this is due partly to the fact **our state has been lenient when it comes to sentencing people who commit multiple DUI offenses**.

Through the passage of **House Bill 3317**, five convictions of driving under the influence in a ten-year period will result in a **Class C felony** and **jail time**.

This bill is a step in the right direction. However, allowing five drunk driving convictions is far too lenient, and I'll continue to work for stronger sentences.

## SPENDING YOUR TAX DOLLARS WISELY



### *Disappointing state supplemental budget*

Our state is riding the momentum of a national upturn in the economy and, as a result, **state coffers are at healthy surplus levels**. This was not forecasted when our two-year budget was written during the 2005 session.

The supplemental budget is passed in even-numbered years – such as 2006 – and is a midcourse adjustment to our operating budget. Normally, adjustments are minor and accommodate emergent state needs, but don't impact policy. This was not the case this year as policies were adopted that add to our future fiscal obligations.

The end result was a supplemental budget that authorizes the **largest spending increase in state history** – one that sets us up for a deficit in our next budget cycle. **I voted against this budget** for these reasons.

This is not to say that there weren't some worthy causes that benefited from this budget, but I believe **we should save our extra money** and **prepare for the future**.

This year would have been a great time to create a **permanent "rainy day" fund** – a provision in the state constitution that would require lawmakers to put a percentage of money away every budget cycle to protect the state during tough economic times.

There will always be philosophical differences about how government spends your tax dollars, but mine remains constant: I believe in **funding all essential state services**, while **looking for savings** in the process. Government needs to be **accountable for the use of taxpayers' dollars**.

## STATE PENSIONS

As a member of the Select Committee on Pension Policy, I'm happy to report we passed a series of bills this year that will address some of the inequities we've seen in our state pension system. I'm confident **we are on the right path** and we'll continuously monitor progress to **ensure our retirees receive what has been promised to them by the state**.

# REPORT FROM THE LEGISLATURE

## HELPING SMALL EMPLOYERS PROVIDE HEALTH INSURANCE



Our state's employers still face cumbersome regulations and an overall **unfriendly business climate**. These conditions have caused many employers to close shop, downsize, or reduce benefits such as health care insurance for employees.

**More must be done to help our employers** – especially in helping clear a path for them to offer health insurance to employees. **House Bill 2572, after being amended by the Senate, offered hope for small employers.** But as it came back to the House, **these amendments were rejected** and the bill ended up being very watered down to the point that I could not vote for it.

**I supported the following amendments** that would have made this measure strong and great for our employers. I'll continue to support these concepts in the future:

- Offering a **business and occupation tax credit** for small employers who provide health care for their employees;
- Providing subsidies for individuals who have **health savings accounts**;
- **Eliminating the requirement** that subsidized health benefit plans must be equivalent to the costly Basic Health Plan; and
- Offering **less expensive, mandate-free health care plans**.

## FIXING OUR UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE SYSTEM

Our state unemployment insurance system is designed to provide partial wage replacement for workers who lose their jobs through no fault of their own. It is financed by employers that pay into our state's system.

As long as I've been in the Legislature, this system has had its challenges and there have been varying solutions. In 2006, we made some changes to the system that I think will help **ensure it is solvent and stable** in the future – and, most importantly, **serve the needs of our unemployed workers**. Both parties worked with unions and business to come up with a plan that is fair to employees and employers.

## HELPING OUR FARMERS



### *Energy costs*

This year we were able to provide some **relief to our farmers** by **exempting them from sales and use taxes on diesel fuel** used for nonhighway purposes. The bill covers diesel fuel used for soil preparation, crop cultivation, and crop harvesting services.

**Family farms are such a vital part of our state's economy** and this relief was important to them. While this was a step in the right direction, **we still need to do more to help the farmers** of our state.

### *Biodiesel*

We passed a measure this year that will require all gasoline in the state to contain at least 2 percent ethanol by 2009, and all diesel fuel to contain at least 2 percent of biofuel made from animal fats or canola, mustard, or other vegetable crops.

I'm not a proponent of government mandates and would rather see a **gradual, industry-driven shift to biodiesel products** in our state. Nevertheless, this legisla-



*Rep. Crouse talks with Rep. Bruce Chandler about a bill during a House Commerce and Labor Committee hearing.*

# REP. LARRY CROUSE • DISTRICT 4

## HELPING OUR FARMERS *continued from pg. 3*

tion will **provide economic incentives to farmers** and be **friendlier to our environment** if we can perfect its use in vehicles in years to come.

Another part of this commitment is the **funding of a canola seed crusher in Spokane**, which **helps our local economy** as we embrace this new technology.

## ASSISTING THE TIMBER INDUSTRY

We were able to provide some much needed **assistance to our timber industry** this legislative session – an important sector of our economy that has faced unique challenges. Through the passage of **Senate Bill 6874**, the **business and occupation tax rate is reduced** from 0.484 percent to 0.2904 percent for manufacturing and wholesaling wood products. This is something the **timber industry needed** and **deservedly received**.

## LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING

The federal government cut nearly \$80 million in state mental health funding last year. The good news is **we were able to backfill this funding at the state level to ensure services in our district remain intact**. There were some initial problems with the distribution of this backfill but, fortunately, funding levels are now at more satisfactory levels.

## ELIMINATING PARKING FEES IN STATE PARKS

I'm happy to report **you will no longer have to pay a \$5 parking fee** that has been required the last three years when you visited state parks. This fee was repealed this legislative session, and it was the right thing to do for the individuals and families who enjoy our state parks each year. Park services and maintenance will not be affected by the removal of this fee.

## RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET

If you need information about state government, you may find the following Internet sites to be great resources. Or, you can always call or e-mail my office.

**[hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/crouse.htm](http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/crouse.htm)** – offers my views on various issues.

**[access.wa.gov](http://access.wa.gov)** – provides access to state agency services, including applying for unemployment benefits, renewing car tabs, and much more.

**[leg.wa.gov](http://leg.wa.gov)** – offers committee meeting schedules and nearly everything else you'd want to know about the Legislature.



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